

Honorable Senator Joe Rafferty  
Honorable Representative Michael Brennan, and the  
Honorable Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee  
c/o Legislative Information  
100 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333

April 20, 2021

Re: LD 1329, An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Kerem Durdag, and I am the President and COO of GWI. Since 1994, we've been pushing the boundaries of high-speed internet access across the state of Maine with a little thing we like to call reliable internet service. More jobs. More creativity. More growth for Maine and Maine families; we are here to support the citizens and communities in Maine and are committed to expanding future-proof fiber networks to every corner of the state.

Recently we become the first Broadband Carrier in the nation to achieve B Corporation certification. The certification comes after months of planning and qualification work and aligns GWI with other prestigious businesses such as Patagonia, Ben & Jerry's, and on a regional level with businesses such as Allagash Brewing and Tom's of Maine. B Corporation certification requires companies to adhere to the highest standards of social, fiscal, and environmental accountability with a focus on community economic sustainability.

The need by society to have high speed broadband has risen exponentially; specifically fiber optic broadband. Demand for telehealth, distance learning and remote working is now a day-to-day necessity and will remain so even after the pandemic is over. The current federal funding mechanism coupled with state, local and other investments is generating a catalyst for a generational opportunity of public good and private expertise. Hence, large scale broadband projects are being formulated across the state of Maine and for companies such as GWI there is a very high demand for fiber technicians.

We need to train capable and astute people to become fiber technician professionals; specifically become a focused construction crew that can put up fiber and install electronics at the customer site (business and residential). This is part of a broader initiative to bring people who have the right attitude, motivation, and talents but lack education and skills into the company and create an unlimited career path. *Our intentional focus is on the population of people of color, immigrants, rural poor, and women; providing those communities a pathway in an industry that has not been inclusive.*

The bill accomplishes the following goals:

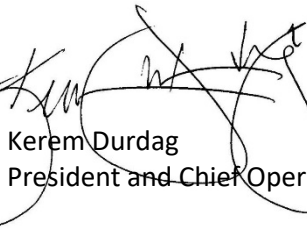
- Advance opportunity and economic equity for Maine's Black, Indigenous, and communities of color, as well as for recent immigrants to Maine.
- Provide individually tailored career navigation for adults facing challenges and barriers to engaging and advancing in Maine's workforce, including:
- Assist immigrants who may have limited English who obtained their education and work experience abroad
- Support Immigrants and native-born Maine adults who have been out of the workforce, are under-employed, or need reskilling or upskilling including:

- Those who never finished high school
- Members of Maine's historically disadvantaged populations
- Formerly incarcerated Mainers
- Immigrants whose experience abroad may need retooling to meet the needs of Maine's job market
- Immigrant professionals needing help with recognition of their education, credentials, and experience gained abroad and with the licensure process, to reenter their profession in Maine, reducing under-employment and "brain waste."

LD 1329 allows for active collaboration between the public and private sector providing technical assistance on apprenticeship while GWI is an employment and training resource to local businesses. Together we will leverage resources, implement training plans, create pathways for educating and informing the public about the attractive wage earning potential, and work towards a sustainable and active eco-system of workforce development that can set a template for other large scale needs that have also been identified by the State of Maine in its 10 year strategic plan and economic recovery roadmap.

LD 1329 puts Maine on the path to being a more equitable state with a stronger economy by helping more Mainers get the expert help they need to be able to participate to their fullest extent in Maine's workforce. GWI supports is wholeheartedly

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kerem Durdag", is written over a circular stamp. The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first and last names being most prominent.

Kerem Durdag  
President and Chief Operating Officer